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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Seventy-third year

Identical letters dated 30 October 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

Innocent, defenseless Palestinian children continue to be murdered in cold blood by the military forces of Israel, the occupying Power, in grave breach of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law. While article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that "every child has the inherent right to life" and commits States parties to ensuring "to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child", Palestinian children are being deprived of this right every single day by this cruel and illegal occupation.

Israel's killing and maiming of Palestinian peaceful protesters in the context of the Great Return March in the blockaded Gaza Strip in particular continues unabated and with absolute impunity. We regret to have to convey yet another list of names of Palestinian civilians, including four children, who were wantonly killed for the sole act of calling for freedom and an end to their dehumanization under this oppressive, colonial occupation.

On 23 October 2018, Muntasir Muhammad al-Bazz, age 17, was killed by Israeli occupying forces, who routinely open fire on unarmed Palestinian civilians, carrying out what is clearly a shoot-to-kill policy.

On 26 October, five Palestinians, Ahmad Said Abu Libdeh, age 22, Ayyash Ghassan Shaath, age 23, Nassar Iyad Abu Teem, age 23, Muhammad Khalid Abd al-Nabi, age 27, and Jabir Abu Hameesa, age 27, were also brutally murdered by the occupying forces.

This was followed on 27 October by the targeting of more than 85 locations in the densely-populated Gaza Strip by Israeli warplanes and the killing on 28 October of three more Palestinian boys: Abdul Hameed Abdul Aziz Abu Zaher, age 13, Mohammed Ibrahim al-Sutari, age 13, and Khaled Bassam Abu Saeed, age 14. This brings the total number of Palestinians killed since the protests began on 30 March to

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at least 217, with more than 20,000 civilians injured, many gravely wounded and disabled for life.

As reported by Amnesty International recently, since the start of the Great Return March, Israeli soldiers have been using "high-velocity military weapons designed to cause maximum harm to Palestinian protesters that do not pose an imminent threat to them." Amnesty decried these "apparently deliberate attempts to kill and maim" as "deeply disturbing, not to mention completely illegal", with some cases appearing to "amount to willful killing, a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions and a war crime". The organization warned that Israel's newly announced "zero-tolerance" policy towards Palestinian protests in Gaza would give Israeli forces "carte-blanche authorization to carry out large-scale, unlawful killings escalating the bloodshed".

Warnings in this regard have been constant and intensifying. During his last briefing to the Security Council, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, stressed, "The situation in Gaza is imploding. This is not a hyperbole. This is not alarmism. It is a reality." Meanwhile, the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Jamie McGoldrick, has stated that aid workers in Gaza are struggling to keep up with this "severe catastrophe", warning the situation "could even be worse" next year.

Yet, despite the plethora of evidence presented by the United Nations, human rights organizations and by paramedics and journalists working on the ground, including eyewitness accounts and video footage describing and showing Israeli snipers, tanks and drones targeting peaceful Palestinian protesters, including children, Israel persists with its distortions and complete fabrications, implying that Palestinians, on the receiving end of Israeli bullets, are to blame for their own killing and that its illegal actions are intended to counter threats to its security.

This false and offensive narrative must be rejected, and the right of the Palestinian people to peaceful assembly must be reaffirmed. Moreover, it is incumbent upon the international community to remind the occupying Power of its obligations under international law and to insist on respect and an end to Israel's assumption of exceptionalism.

Such systematic dehumanization of the Palestinian people compels us to insist that no peoples, Palestinian or otherwise, can be expected to endure decades of violent oppression, domination and control without at least voicing their rejection of such injustice, including by means of peaceful protest. It is not strange, but rather normal, and should be expected under the circumstances, that Palestinians would rise up to protest the unbearable conditions forced upon them, including in Gaza, which far too many have acknowledged has literally been turned into an open-air prison by Israel's 11-year illegal blockade. As stated by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk, the dire conditions in Gaza "explain much about the impetus for the large-scale demonstrations that the world has witnessed over the last seven months at the Gaza frontier".

The fact is that, despite our repeated appeals for urgent international action to deter Israel from its perpetual crimes, the absence of accountability has only made our people even more vulnerable to the brutality of this illegal occupation. The international community must act with urgency to enforce the rules of international law. Everyone knows that the Israeli occupation cannot subsist a single day without the commission by the occupying Power of gross and flagrant violations — its very existence is dependent on criminality. It is beyond high-time for serious action to hold Israel accountable for its crimes as a necessary, primary step towards finally bringing to an end the root cause of the Palestinian people's grievances and suffering: the

51-year colonial occupation of Palestine, including the 11-year air, sea and land blockade on Gaza.

In this regard, we must also draw your attention once again to the ongoing deliberate and systematic violations being committed by the occupying Power in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where Israel persists with its colonial settlement enterprise, enacted and maintained by Israeli officials at all levels of the State, combined with explicit, provocative and aggressive statements by Israeli politicians calling for the annexation of the West Bank. As described last week by Mr. Lynk, "During five decades of the occupation, Israel has steadily entrenched its sovereign footprint throughout the West Bank" and Israeli parliamentarians have taken major initiatives during the past year "that have become a flashing green light for more formal annexation steps".

The following events of recent weeks represent just a few instances of the constant violations and daily brutality faced by Palestinians as a result of Israel's settlement activities.

This week, the Israeli government announced its intention to proceed with the construction of 20,000 more illegal settlement units in Occupied East Jerusalem. In early October, Israel approved a $6 million construction project to also expand settlements in the heart of the occupied city of Al-Khalil (Hebron), where 800 settlers already reside illegally. On 27 October, Israeli settlers took over a Palestinian house in the Silwan district of East Jerusalem after Israeli soldiers had forced out its 11 inhabitants at gunpoint, leaving the Abu Snaineh family homeless. Israeli settlers continue to terrorize Palestinian civilians, with a weekly average of five attacks resulting in injuries or property damage since the beginning of 2018.

Compounding this appalling reality, the occupying Power has also continued to violate the sanctity and historical status of Jerusalem. On 25 October, Israeli occupation forces violently beat and detained Coptic priests at the entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in East Jerusalem. While the Coptic Church has had a continuous presence in Palestine since at least the fourth century and is an integral part of Palestinian societal fabric, Israel continues to harass, intimidate and demean clergy and parishioners. This is all undeniably part and parcel of its insistence on hammering its supremacist ideology by subjugating all non-Jews under its control to racist incitement and attacks, as illustrated recently by the Israeli Knesset's adoption of the so-called "Jewish nation-state law", which explicitly denies full rights to non-Jews.

Such violent dehumanization also translates into the routine killing of Palestinians in the West Bank, where last week alone, three Palestinians were killed: Uthman Ladadweh, age 38, Muhammad Mahmoud Bisharat, age 23, and Muhammad Muammar al-Atrash, age 42.

Meanwhile, Israel continues to impede the international community from witnessing its crimes, with constant distortions of reality through its propaganda and obstruction of the work of human rights organizations documenting violations by its occupying forces. This was illustrated in the Security Council itself on 18 October, when the director of the Israeli human rights organization "B'Tselem", Hagai El-Ad, was slurred with intimidating remarks by the Israeli representative, who called him "an Israeli citizen in the service of the enemy" and a "collaborator" in Hebrew. Mr. El-Ad also drew the wrath of several Israeli leaders, being called a "disgrace", "foreign agent", "illegitimate" and a "Trojan horse". Oren Hazan, a lawmaker in the Likud party, went as far as posting an image of Mr. El-Ad on his social media page with the text "Wanted dead or alive".

We appeal once again to the international community to show its support to the efforts of Palestinian, Israeli and other human rights activists by denouncing such intimidation and incitement and by heeding the calls of humanitarians and human rights organizations to ensure respect for international law. This is critical to ending the monumental injustice faced by the Palestinian people. Statements of condemnation will not suffice; concrete action is needed to end impunity, protect civilians and uphold their human rights and to salvage the prospects for a peaceful and secure future that is in such grave jeopardy at this time.

The present letter is in follow-up to our 649 previous letters regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the territory of the State of Palestine. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 16 October 2018 (A/ES-10/798–S/2018/928) constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all these war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Feda **Abdelhady-Nasser**
Ambassador, Chargé d'affaires a.i.